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SYNOPSIS

Establishes New Jersey Civic Information Consortium.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As amended by the Senate on June 25, 2018.

AN ACT establishing the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium¹[.] and¹ supplementing Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes¹[, and making an appropriation]¹.

BE IT ENACTED by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:

1. The Legislature finds and declares that:
 - a. The people of New Jersey need accurate, relevant, timely, and trustworthy news and information to be civically engaged, make informed voting decisions, and work toward common solutions in their communities.

b. News media operations in the State have endured major cutbacks in recent years, resulting in less coverage of important State matters. These cutbacks not only hurt the news media's financial health, but also harm communities by reducing the news and civic information to which residents have access.

c. This situation has resulted in the need to authorize the establishment of, and to fund, the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium (consortium), a consortium of five State public universities, to advance research and innovation in the field of media and technology to better inform the State's communities to benefit the State's civic life and evolving information needs.

d. By leveraging the resources, knowledge, and expertise of the State's public universities through a partnership with The College of New Jersey, Montclair State University, the New Jersey Institute of Technology, Rowan University, and Rutgers, The State University, the consortium could bolster public-interest journalism, civic information, and media innovation.

e. The consortium would provide grants that support news and information that benefit the State's civic life and meet the evolving information needs of New Jersey's underserved communities.

f. Investments from the consortium, supporting the State's academia, media, innovation, and community service sectors, could advance these goals while ensuring financial sustainability, accountability, and lasting public faith in both the consortium and the work it supports.

g. It is therefore necessary and in the public interest to establish the consortium and provide a funding source for the awarding of grants to organizations working to meet these goals.

2. As used in P.L. , c. (C.) (pending before the Legislature as this bill):

"Board of directors" or "board" means the board of directors of the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium established pursuant of section 3 of P.L. , c. (C.) (pending before the Legislature as this bill).

"Consortium" means the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium established pursuant to section 3 of P.L. , c. (C.) (pending before the Legislature as this bill).

"In-kind contribution" means a contribution of goods or services, other than a cash grant.

"Local community organization" means a locally-based organization serving a community of people having shared interests that is incorporated, organized, and operated in such a manner as to qualify as a nonprofit corporation described in section 501(c)(3) of the federal Internal Revenue Code, 26 U.S.C. s.501(c)(3).

"Member university" means The College of New Jersey, Montclair State University, the New Jersey Institute of Technology, Rowan University, and Rutgers, The State University.

3. a. There is established the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium which shall consist of the following member universities: The College of New Jersey; Montclair State University; the New Jersey Institute of Technology; Rowan University; and Rutgers, The State University. The purpose of the consortium shall be to advance research and innovation in the field of media and technology to benefit the State's civic life and evolving information needs.

b. The consortium shall be established as a nonprofit corporation that is an educational and charitable corporation validly existing and in good standing under the "New Jersey Nonprofit Corporation Act,"

P.L.1983, c.127 (N.J.S.15A:1-1 et seq.), is incorporated, organized, and operated in such a manner as to qualify as a nonprofit corporation described in section 501(c)(3) of the federal Internal Revenue Code, 26 U.S.C. s.501(c)(3), and structured as a supporting organization to its member universities in a manner that the Internal Revenue Service would deem the consortium to be a public charity, and shall be subject to all applicable State laws governing nonprofit corporations. The consortium shall be accountable and subject to the same federal Internal Revenue Code disclosure requirements of any nonprofit organization pursuant to 26 U.S.C. s.6033, such as making public its Internal Revenue Service Form 990 and filing a copy of that form and a copy of its annual financial report and audited financial reports with the Attorney General.

4. a. The consortium shall have a board of directors that shall set strategic priorities and metrics to guide the consortium's grant-making and other initiatives, as well as to approve grants pursuant to section 7 of P.L. , c. (C.) (pending before the Legislature as this bill).

b. The board of directors shall consist of ¹[13] ¹⁵¹ members as follows:

(1) two members appointed by the Governor ²who shall not be of the same political party²;

(2) one member appointed by the President of the Senate ¹, and one member appointed by the Minority Leader of the Senate¹ ;

(3) one member appointed by the Speaker of the General Assembly ¹, and one member appointed by the Minority Leader of the General Assembly¹ ;

(4) five members ², no more than three of whom shall be of the same political party,² appointed by the president of each member university, each of whom shall have background or experience in the field of journalism, media, or technology; and

(5) four members ², no more than two of whom shall be of the same political party², appointed by a majority vote of the nine board members appointed pursuant to paragraphs (1) through (4) of this subsection, of which: (a) one member shall represent the media sector; (b) one member shall represent the technology sector; and (c) two members, not employed by the State or a member university at the time of the member's appointment, shall have demonstrated a record of commitment to public service and understand the importance of media and technology to the State's future.

²[¹Appointments to the board shall be made in such manner so that no more than eight members shall be of the same political party¹]²

c. Each board member shall serve a term of four years, except that the member representing the New Jersey media sector shall serve an initial term of one year and the member representing the New Jersey technology sector shall serve an initial term of two years. No board member shall serve more than two four-year terms. In the appointment of members to the board, every effort shall be made to strive for diversity and balance of representation according to gender, race, ethnicity, and geography within any limits allowed under law. Any vacancies in the appointed membership of the board occurring other than by expiration of term shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointment, but for the unexpired term only. Board members shall serve without compensation but may be reimbursed for necessary expenses incurred in the performance of their duties within the limits of funds available to the board.

5. a. The board shall appoint and employ an executive director, and fix the executive director's compensation and conditions of employment. The executive director shall be the chief executive, administrative, and operational officer of the consortium and shall direct and supervise the administrative affairs and the general management of the consortium. The executive director shall oversee the consortium's day-to-day operations, which includes working with the board to meet the consortium's goals and grant-making requirements, hiring and managing program officers and administrative staff pursuant to subsection b. of this section, acting as spokesperson for the consortium's work, and raising funds from external sources. The executive director shall attend all meetings of the board.

b. (1) The executive director shall employ program officers who shall be experienced practitioners with a strong understanding of the media or civic technology fields. The executive director shall strive to appoint program officers that represent the State's racial, ethnic, gender, and geographic diversity within any limits allowed under law. The program officers shall manage the grant-making process, in accordance with the consortium's goals. The grant-making process shall include soliciting, recommending, and processing grant proposals, working with grantees to ensure work on grant project ideas, and directing public engagement and evaluation efforts.

(2) The executive director shall employ no more than three administrative staff to provide operational support for the consortium, including office management, support for the executive director and program officers, coordination among member universities, payment to grantees, human resources, and logistics.

c. To save on startup, operating, and ongoing administrative costs, one member university shall be responsible for housing the consortium and providing back-office support.

6. The consortium shall be a collaborative effort among the member universities. Each member university shall focus its initiatives on one area of expertise and the board of directors shall decide on each member university's focus of expertise in order to allow for greater collaboration among member universities, decrease competition for grants, and reduce redundancy of efforts. Member universities may collaborate on projects together, as well as seek out other academic institutions to partner with on seeking grants.

7. a. To be eligible for a grant from the consortium, a grant proposal application shall include, but not be limited to:

(1) evidence of a collaboration between at least one member of the faculty or graduate student of a member university and at least one local community organization, media organization, or technology-based organization;

(2) information demonstrating that the collaboration would be a mutually respectful partnership wherein all community and member university participants invest in a project designed to serve the consortium's mission and the goals cited pursuant to subsection b. of this section; and

(3) proof that the member university or universities in total will provide an amount of funding or make an in-kind contribution having a value that matches 10 percent of the amount of grant funding for which the applicant has applied, if an application is sponsored by one or more member universities. For a grant proposal application sponsored by a member university housing the consortium and providing back-office support

pursuant to subsection c. of section 5 of P.L. , c. (C.) (pending before the Legislature as this bill), the cost of that housing and support to that member university shall count towards the funding or in-kind contribution match from that member university.

b. The consortium shall provide grants for projects that achieve the following goals:

- (1) improve the quantity and quality of civic information in New Jersey communities;
- (2) give residents enhanced access to useful government data and public information through innovative applications, platforms, and technologies;
- (3) train students, professionals, and community members in the practice of community storytelling, journalism, and media production;
- (4) nurture better civic engagement and dialogue inside and between New Jersey communities;
- (5) better meet the information needs of low-income communities and racial and ethnic communities that have been underserved by the media; and
- (6) invest in research and practices that can help media outlets become more closely connected to their audiences and more sustainable without government support.

8. A grant issued by the consortium shall be in the form of a grant agreement. A grant agreement shall include a provision establishing a set of metrics for assessing the goals contained in the agreement to ensure evaluation of a grantee project on how well those metrics are being met and any other relevant accountability measures. The set of metrics shall be established by the board in conjunction with the executive director and program officers. The agreement shall include the expectations stated between the consortium and the grantee, which shall include, but not be limited to, a statement that:

- a. the grantee shall be independent from the influence of the State, a member university, and any other grantor or contributor of funds or outside source; and
- b. any grantor or other contributor of funds to the grantee shall acknowledge in writing the grantor's or contributor's understanding that the grant or donation does not entitle the grantor or contributor to dictate or influence the content of any work the grantee produces or may produce.

9. a. The consortium shall annually report to the Governor and, pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1), to the Legislature, on the activities of the consortium and make the report available on the consortium's Internet website. The report shall include, but not be limited to:

- (1) a list of all grant applicants and approved grant applicants;
 - (2) the grant amounts of approved grant applicants;
 - (3) the amount of matching funds and types of in-kind contributions provided to approved grant applicants; and
 - (4) a status report on the activities funded by an approved grant applicant.
- b. The consortium shall make available on its Internet website its grant-making criteria and other relevant documents.

c. The board, in conjunction with the executive director and program officers, shall hold one public hearing annually in the northern, central, and southern regions of the State. The public hearings shall provide a forum for the board to report on how the public funds that the consortium receives are spent and to gather

public input on what the consortium's mission should be and whether the consortium is meeting its mission. Public input shall be used to assess whether the consortium's grant-making metrics and process for issuing grants needs to be changed.

¹[10. There is appropriated from the General Fund to the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium, established pursuant to section 3 of P.L. , c. (C.) (pending before the Legislature as this bill), \$20,000,000 in the first fiscal year in which the bill is enacted and an additional \$1,000,000 annually thereafter, to effectuate the purposes of P.L. , c. (C.) (pending before the Legislature as this bill).]¹

¹[11.] 10.¹ This act shall take effect immediately.